

The oldest known Miocene snake fauna from Central Europe: Merkur-North locality, Czech Republic

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The Early Miocene Merkur-North locality (MN 3a) represents the oldest known Miocene ophidian locality in Europe east of Germany. The snake assemblage is characterised by high species diversity and includes the following families: Boidae (*Bavarioboa* sp.), Colubridae (*Coluber dolnicensis*, *Coluber suevicus*, *Coluber caspioides*, cf. *Elaphe* sp., *Natrix merkurensis* sp. nov., *Natrix sansaniensis*), Elapidae (Elapidae gen. et sp. indet.), and Viperidae (*Vipera* sp.-"Vipera aspis" complex). Fossils of the extinct species, *Coluber dolnicensis*, *Coluber suevicus*, and *Natrix sansaniensis*, represent their earliest known occurrences. The cranial elements of *C. suevicus* and *N. sansaniensis* are described for the first time. Discoveries of cf. *Elaphe* sp. may represent the earliest fossil member of the genus *Elaphe*. Elapidae gen. et sp. indet. probably represents the oldest known member of the cobras.

Key words: Snakes, Boidae, Colubridae, Elapidae, Viperidae, Early Miocene, Czech Republic

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